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RELIEF FROM COAL SHORTAGE¹

On October 8, 1920, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued Service Order 21, for the purpose of enabling railways to deliver coal for essential public uses more expeditiously than was practicable under prior orders. The wording of this order was, in part:

That public utilities which directly serve the general public under a franchise therefor with street and interurban railways, electric power and light, gas, water and sewer works; also ice plants which directly supply the public generally with ice; also hospitals, schools and other public institutions of the United States, state or municipal governments, may be kept supplied with coal for current use but not for storage, exchange or sale. . . .

On the face of this order, it did not permit railways to assist in relieving coal shortage at a municipal water plant, except by a rather severe stretching of the term "other public institutions of the . . . municipal governments." In order to make sure that municipal water departments would receive the same aid as private water companies, President Little sent a letter on October 28 to the Car Service Division of the American Railway Association, the agent of the Interstate Commerce Commission in executing its emergency work to meet the coal shortage conditions. Following are extracts from this letter:

¹ Abstract of correspondence between Beekman C. Little, President of the American Water Works Association, and the Car Service Division, American Railway Association, Washington.

I am asking your coöperation and advice in devising some method whereby water works plants may obtain, not only as good service as the other public utilities may get, but the best possible and, perhaps, the first service in the matter of preferential coal supply in the coming months, when the situation may become very critical. . . . If the water supply fails, not only is the greatest aid to fire protection gone, but all industries and the health and life of the community are threatened. If the failure continues for any length of time, disaster is inevitable and the functioning of *all* public utilities must cease.

I understand that your Committee has been designated as the agent of the Interstate Commerce Commission to be responsible for the delivery of coal to gas and electric utilities in the United States. . . . The water companies have been given no special consideration and have, as you know, no representation on your Committee. This may be due partly to some unintentional oversight by those having the matter in charge and partly, perhaps largely, to the lack of initiative on the side of our water works engineers and managers, who too frequently take it for granted that all others, as well as themselves, realize the extreme necessity of the Public Water Works System and the utmost importance of keeping it constantly in commission. However, the reason for this particular neglect of the water utilities is of minor importance if the affair can now be immediately remedied. The American Water Works Association, with over 1400 members, representing water works plants in various cities in every State in the Union, asks your help and also proffers any aid in its power to bring about better assurance of future coal deliveries.

President Little's letter brought a letter dated November 2 from A. G. Gutheim, manager of the Public Relations Section, Car Service Division, of the American Railroad Association. This letter stated that for administrative purposes a distinction was made between utilities operated under a franchise, and other public utilities such as municipal water works. A committee has been appointed to look after the current needs of coal by non-franchise utilities and among its members are Col. D. B. Wentz, president of the National Coal Association, and W. L. Barnes, executive manager of the Car Service Division of the American Railroad Association, both of Washington. Applications for coal for immediate use, which cannot be obtained through usual channels, should be sent to either of these men. If there is evidence that the applicant is faced by conditions making special relief necessary, a certificate to that effect will be sent to the Interstate Commerce Commission for action by it. It must be kept in mind, however, that coal fuel is furnished in this way only for current daily needs and not for "storage, exchange or sale." The application should be accompanied by the information called for by the following data schedule:

- Name of public utility or public institution (other than Gas & Electric Utilities).....
- Address.....Date.....
1. Present stock of coal in net tons.....
 2. Daily requirements (period ending March 15, 1921) in net tons.
.....
 3. Annual requirements in net tons.....
 4. Tonnage contracted for.....
 5. Number of days required to move coal from mines.....
 6. Percentage of daily requirements (net tons) shipped during last two weeks.
.....
 7. Tonnage of coal reported now in transit.....
 8. Kind of coal (gas or steam).....
 9. Give description of any other fuels used.....
 10. Can you adjust your requirements to use (a) mine run.....
(b) lump.....(c) slack.....
 11. Received by rail or water.....
 12. (a) Name of contractor*.....
(b) Period of contract.....
(c) Location of mines.....
(d) Original shipping point.....
(e) Originating railroad.....
(f) Routing to destination.....
(g) What explanation does railroad give for inability to protect requirements.....

* Information required on each individual contract.